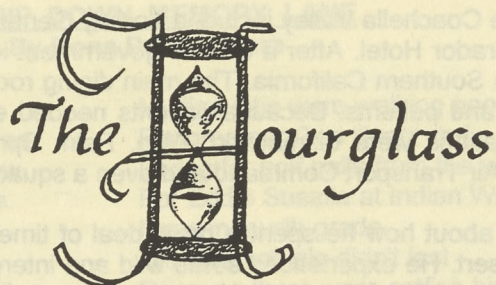


Historical Society of Palm Desert

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Community

Service

Collections

Archives

SPRING 2005

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WAR TOUCHES THE DESERT

Compiled from HSPD archives

By V. Folkers - Curator

As the United States is struggling with war on foreign soil today, we look back to 1943 when U.S. armed forces confiscated acres of sand in our desert. General George S. "Old Blood and Guts" Patton, a former cavalryman-turned-tank expert, was named commanding general of the Desert Training Center. Troops heading for the conflict in North Africa had to be trained in desert heat and sand. Patton had his headquarters on Monroe Street in Indio, just off Highway 111. The Society archives contain numerous documents, like parts of a giant jigsaw puzzle, which help to tell the story.



With Camp Young as the command post, several hundred square miles of the Chuckawalla and Mojave Deserts was used for training in armored warfare. They needed an intermediate location, so officers literally took over a large area of the Palm Desert cove for use as a practice area in deployment under air attack. Later it was used as an installation for repair of motor vehicles. Owners of the land testify that they were not consulted in the matter, and historical details have not been supplied by the government. Pioneer residents tell us that there was great activity, with caravans of trucks and carriers coming and going. The installation was removed in 1944. The last vestiges of army activity were large blocks of foundation concrete which were removed when developers of Shadow Mountain Club began landscaping operations. (1)

The Palm Village vehicle pool was situated along Portola Avenue and south of Highway 111. On the other side of the highway there was a gas station, a small motel, a store and a water supply facility. North where Portola meets the Whitewater Channel was a fruit and date ranch belonging to Edgar Bergen. That was all there was in the area except for some date groves. The office for this camp consisted of two large tents located directly across Portola from where the present elementary school now stands. The Ironwood area was used as a rifle range. Vehicle break-downs were continuous, which explains the six large concrete platforms which were spread out west of Portola and south of Shadow Mountain Drive. A maintenance production line was established to keep the 6000 vehicles operational. (2)

Did you know that General Patton stopped at Randall's Garage in Thermal and asked Mr. Randall to design and fabricate a frame to cover a JEEP to make it simulate a TANK. He also provided the fabric for the cover. Upon completion, the design was sent to a manufacturer for mass production. Wouldn't it be interesting to know how many of the "TANKS" counted by the Germans were actually camouflaged JEEPS ? (3)

Other military installations in the Coachella Valley included Torney General Hospital in Palm Springs. It was located in the once world-famous El Mirador Hotel. After a sizable government investment in improvements, it was known as one of the finest hospitals in Southern California. The main dining room, pool, tennis courts, and cottages were all used by medical personnel and patients. Because patients needed extra time to recover, it was used for four years after other valley installations were dismantled. Also, Palm Springs Army Air Field was located on the outskirts of the village, and the Air Transport Command and even a squadron of WACS were stationed there. (4)

Desert artist, John Hilton, tells about how he spent a great deal of time as an unofficial guide to army personnel when they first came to the desert. He experienced some wild and interesting rides in everything from a jeep to a tank in order to help locate roads, maneuver areas, ranges and targets. Our desert area had one of three potential properties where calcite was mined. It was used in a secret instrument that saved lives and equipment during the war. Some of the crystals would have been highly prized by any museum in the world. Hilton aided the army in its effort to leave the desert as they found it, in its natural quiet beauty. (5)

Many old timers will recall when General Patton brought his tank units out here to toughen up his soldiers for duty in North Africa. The main base was Camp Young up at Shaver's Summit (now Chiriaco Summit). He had a small airstrip there for staff and reconnaissance planes. A tent city was built almost overnight. Repair facilities were located where Palm Desert is today, and warehouses and packing sheds were requisitioned all over the valley. One of the problems with a tank outfit is keeping it supplied with gasoline, oil, ammo, and water for men and machines. Patton thought he could cut down on the amount of water his supply corps would have to haul by reducing a tiny bit each GI's ration of drinking water each day. He soon found out that he wasn't building a bunch of leathery desert rats, but there were an awful lot of heat prostrated soldiers. (6)

During the General Patton era, we lived on Avenue G in Cathedral City. The wives of the ordnance officers had no transportation (no gasoline), no air-conditioning, and only one phone in the city at the gas station. "Le Girls" walked to a coffee shop and communed. When we arrived from Fortress Monroe, VA, we had never heard of a side-winder or a coyote. The first night in the desert Bob left his army pistol in the car, and SOMETHING made a terrible racquet. We later learned some coyotes were digging a ditch outside our bedroom window. In Palm Village there was a polluted pool and one motel on the north side of what we now call Highway 111. The road to Blythe was about 20 feet wide, and the army troops were in great danger when they drove thru the pass en route to maneuvers at Desert Training Center. (7)

Sources: (1) portion of a manuscript, author unknown (2) Bob Reid's oral history (3) CVHS newsletter, 5-00
 (4) Palm Springs Pictorial 43/44 (5) Desert Magazine 6-44
 (6) C. Shelton, Palm Desert Post 6-18-75 (7) letter from Iris & Bob Reid, 8-11-75

DID YOU KNOW ?

That the Carlotta Retirement & Health Care Center was named after Carlotta Marzicola? She was the mother of George and John Marzicola who live in Rancho Mirage. On February 5, Carlotta died at the venerable age of 107. She was born on September 18, 1897 to Salvatore and Anna D'Medici Aguglia in Cerda, Sicily, Italy. In the early 1900s she married Oreste Marzicola in Chicago. A homemaker for 85 years, she also worked as a riveter at Lockheed Aircraft during World War II.

NEW MEMBERS

Business:

Marrakesh Real Estate
 Casuelas Café
 Restaurante Guillermo's

Contributing:

Mr. & Mrs. David Talbot

Family: Robert & Maureen Phillips
 Mr. & Mrs. Carl Mahakian

Individual:

Alban "Jim" Wolff
 E. George Marzicola
 Ronda Rockwell
 John "Jack" Reith
 Doris M. Ellis

Note: Remember to patronize our business members, we appreciate their support.

MEMBERSHIP

John Marmon and Dick Folkers want you to talk to you people with whom you do business, friends, relatives, and neighbors to solicit new memberships for the Society. Your enthusiasm and interest in the work that we do is contagious, so spread the word !!!

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE**By Dona Driskel Mara**

Before the condos and gated palaces
 There were the dunes and groves of date palms.
 Before the six lane highway and restaurant row
 There was Painter's Path and Andy's donkeys.

Before the mega screen theatre
 There was Shield's "The Sex Life of the Date."

I walked home from my bus stop
 Along a road lined with sage,
 Clapping my hands to chase away
 The coyotes circling nearby.

Spring brought the scent of grapefruit blossoms.
 Summers were spent in you swimsuit.
 Fall meant a trip to Palm Springs
 To shop for school clothes at Mary Helen's.
 Winter was setting your air conditioning to 65
 So you could light a fire on Christmas Day.

Your neighbors were mailmen or retired actors
 Or the man who drove the "honey wagon"
 To pump your septic tank.

My first jobs were walking poodles
 For groomer Geri Knarr and
 Diving for golf balls from the water hazards
 For Eddie Susalla at Indian Wells Golf Course.
 I was in fourth grade.
 The golf ball gig didn't last
 Because there were catfish bigger than I.

The date palms are gone,
 But I remember cycling through the shadows of their
 groves
 And blessing them for the brief respite from the
 summer sun.

The dunes are now covered with hotels and houses,
 But I can still watch Shadow Mountain
 Change hues with oncoming dusk.

And if I close my eyes,
 The sweet scent of grapefruit blossoms
 Reminds me
 That Spring promises miracles,
 No matter how the landscape may change.

Note: Dona is a member of the Society and the daughter of Doloris Driskel. A pioneer in the Palm Desert area, Doloris is a past member of the Society's Board of Directors and was very active in the days when Ed Mullins was putting the Society back on its feet. We think of Doloris fondly as "Mrs. Santa Clause" because that was her role for so many years in the Golf Cart Parade.

SPRING LUNCHEON

Kay Young has volunteered to chair this event on Wednesday, April 20, at Shadow Mountain Club & Resort. The social hour will begin at 11:00 a.m. and lunch will be served at 12:00 noon. You will be receiving an invitation in the mail, so make your reservations earlycost: \$20 for members (and) \$25 for non-members. **Invite a guest** -- if he/she buys a membership at the sign-in table, his/her lunch is free. We are fortunate to have as our speaker, Jim Cornett, noted botanist & author, and long-time columnist for the Desert Sun. The topic of Mr. Cornett's talk will be "Secrets of the Oasis Palm."

ANNUAL PICNIC

The Society picnic at Civic Center Park in the large pavilion is held every year in memory of one of our most auspicious past-presidents, Ed Mullins. Owner of the first pharmacy in Palm Desert, a City Councilman, and many other things to a wide range of people -- Ed never retired from community involvement. He was a "spark plug" for the Historical Society and we miss him still. Carole Cole is chairing this event.

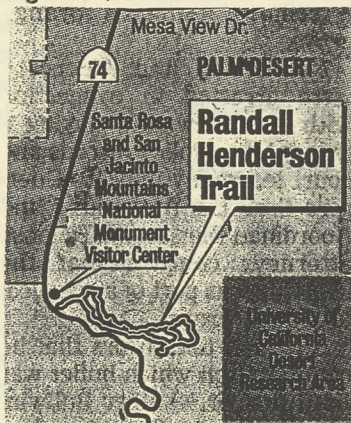
Date: Sunday, April 3 Time: 11:30 a.m. social (and) 12:00 noon lunch
 Lunch: Keedy Style Burgers -- cooked by the Keedy Kids "Doug and Barbara"....
 Cost: \$5.00 per person, includes burger, chips, dessert & beverage
 Call: 346-6588 and tell us how many will be in your party

FOUNDER'S DAY
PALM AWARDS

Sunday, May 15, is the date for this annual celebration for members and citizens in general. Dan Callahan & Joyce White are co-chairing this event which will honor four members of the community. Pioneer attorney in Palm Desert, Jean Ann Hirschi, will be the recipient of this year's Founder's Day award. Virginia Waring and Joyce White will give us background on Ms. Hirschi. Palm Awards will be given to persons currently active in the community in various endeavors. Time 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. This event will be held in the City Council Chambers and refreshments will be served. There is no charge for anyone who would like to attend.

RANDALL HENDERSON TRAIL DEDICATION

More than 60 years ago this man starting taking excursions into the desert with a buddy just to enjoy the peace and quiet, the beauty where others might see desolation, and even the hot days and the chilly nights. The desert was one of his two great loves, the other was the appreciation of the written word. That is why people in our hectic society still enjoy a good read from issues of the old Desert Magazine, which he owned and edited for years.



On February 5, 2005 the Henderson trail was the second to be officially dedicated by the City of Palm Desert. It starts near the Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center on Highway 74. It is a one-hour hike of moderate difficulty, rising 342 feet. The first trail was dedicated to William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd in January of 2004 and begins at Homme-Adams Park. A third trail will become official in April 2005, honoring Herb Jeffries, a movie star and member of Duke Ellington's Orchestra, who currently lives in Idyllwild.

Did you get a copy of the recently published Palm Desert Magazine - Winter 2005 edition? It was compiled by one of our favorite columnists, Ann Japenga. As always, her historical research work is superb. You'll want a copy to show to people who aren't as fortunate as we who reside in this beautiful place.

DONATIONS TO THE SOCIETY'S ARCHIVES

Councilman Richard S. Kelly - A "History of Telephone Service in the Coachella Valley", a comprehensive study done with painstaking research from a number of sources including personal experience, as Dick Kelly is retired from working for the telephone company.

Jean Ernst - three newspaper articles on topics as follows:

Medical Facilities - Carlotta Retirement & Health Care Center	2-05
Politicians ((Gil Anderson))	5-66
Streets - El Paseo	5-66

America's National symbol of "Uncle Sam"

The identity of a real-life Uncle Sam was discovered by Thomas Gerson, a historian, from a May 12, 1830 issue of the New York Gazette in 1961. Samuel Wilson was born in Menotomy, MA (now Arlington.) At age eight he served as a drummer boy on the village green. He alerted the locals of the recoats' advance and saved the town. At age fourteen he joined the army and fought in the American Revolution. He moved to Troy, New York in 1789 and opened a meat-packing plant. Because he was jovial and honest, people affectionately called him "Uncle Sam."

During the War of 1812, his good reputation won him a military contract to provide beef and pork for the soldiers. To earmark crates in his warehouse for the military he stamped them "U.S.", though the abbreviation for "United States" was not yet used. When government inspectors asked a meat packer what it meant, he didn't know but responded as a joke, "Uncle Sam." Before long soldiers were calling all government-issued supplies the property of Uncle Sam.

The American flag-colored clothing of Uncle Sam evolved piece-by-piece over the years as illustrators used their creative license. The symbol was officially recognized during the administration of John F. Kennedy. By coincidence, Samuel Wilson said during the War of 1812: "It starts with every one of us giving a little more, instead of only taking and getting all the time." Kennedy stated it more eloquently in his inaugural address: "...ask not what America will do for you -- ask what you can do for your country."

- Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things - 1987
by Charles Panati

"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, and today is a gift; that's why they call it the present."

- Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)

FIRST CAME THE ROAD

Wartime visitors to Palm Springs looked curiously at the beautiful hotel turned hospital. Soldier patients looked enviously out the windows, talking of the day when they could be discharged and leave the desert forever.

Bob Fairless was the one man in the wards who was silent. He cared nothing for plush resort glitter. Each day that he was permitted to leave the hospital was spent tramping the primeval areas of the desert, far from either soldiers or "dudes."

This man was seeking a homestead under the "Small Claims Act," held in abeyance by the war. This soldier and his wife tramped and climbed in the far places, beyond sight or sound of hospital or winter resort.

One day they found a dry desert canyon that was steep, but not too steep to climb.

"I have a hunch there's water somewhere above here," Bob said. "See how fresh and green this vegetation looks? I've asked several people and they tell me it hasn't rained down here for two years."

"The vegetation a bit higher up does look a bit greener," said Evelyn, Bob's wife. "However, that may be just a residue of moisture in the tinajas, those rock depressions where water gathers when it rains."

They had climbed for some time. The canyon abruptly became so steep that its vertical walls looked almost insurmountable.

"Looks like I'm going to have to pull you up that cliff," said Bob. "How about lunch before we tackle it?"

"I don't know how you expect to homestead on vertical rock," said Evelyn wistfully, as she slowly unwrapped a sandwich. "Even if we find water, we'd have to float our house in mid-air. Even Frank Lloyd Wright hasn't done that yet."

Her husband laughed, walking about restlessly as he munched his food. "Just take a look at that piece of driftwood," he said, kicking at an insect-riddled, brown hairy lump. That might have been a palm tree, and that sure means water is somewhere around here."

Evelyn giggled, "Maybe both of us are overcome with the heat and are seeing mirages. Look up through the cleft in that huge rock. I swear it looks like the cottonwood that grows along the river beds in Kansas."

"Mirage it may be," said Bob. "Before I get back to the hospital tonight, I'm going to find out for sure if we're both getting desert crazy. If that's not a tree, I promise not to go exploring any more."

Their eagerness made the stiff climb exhilarating. They reached the top and stood transfixed, like children playing the game of "statue."

"There is my dream," Bob's voice was hushed and reverent. "Palm trees and cottonwood growing in an oasis in the middle of the desert. Evelyn, you and I are going to have this beautiful spot. This is our future desert home."

The days when Bob was allowed to leave the hospital were devoted to intense activity. Bob "chained" or surveyed his precious discovery. Points were established, the claim registered, and a lease signed for a five acre homestead.

The survey disclosed a much easier method of access to the property. Bob discovered that other people had found the valuable spot, but, fortunately for him, had made improper surveys, and so had registered claim for other parcels in the section.

It was necessary to build a road over bottomless soft sand and virtually impassable rock. The young man had a bit of engineering training, which helped. He had no money to hire road builders; therefore, back-breaking work was the basic ingredient of the wilderness road.

Friends were enticed with nearby land claims. Work in the hot sun was too difficult for most people. Summer heat found the young people unassisted hauling dirt for fill, logs for corduroy roads, and small rocks to make a solid foundation over the soft sand. They moved huge rocks out of the path, chopped great pieces off tremendous boulders and snaked them off the road in order to create sufficient passage for a car. The road progressed almost imperceptibly, but advance it did.

The following summer Bob and Evelyn started construction of their desert home.

Today Fair Sands sits nestled among huge granite boulders that protect the cottage from the winds of winter and shade it from the desiccating mid-summer sun.

One of the tremendous rocks forms a huge granite wall bench inside the cottage itself. Below the cottage is a tiny stream almost engulfed by greedy cottonwood and palm trees.

Bob, Evelyn and their two children often sit on the spacious patio, watching the distant cloud of dust that signals the heedless speeder entering Section 36.

"Oh, dear," sighs Evelyn. "Why don't they learn to care for their road?"

Bob Fairless leans against a huge sun-warmed rock, and grins in his quiet way. "They'll learn, alright, after it is ruined. They will then inherit the job of repairing it with hand and back labor. Only when a man struggles with his own bare hands, does he learn to respect what his neighbor has accomplished with back-breaking work."

The story "First Came the Road" on the preceding page was found in the estate papers of Esther Schaak, a prolific writer who homesteaded a place in the Cahuilla Hills with her husband. From these musty, fragile manuscripts we find a touch of relevant history.

Notes from the Board of Directors meeting

March 8, 2005 / President - Hal Rover

Financial - Helene Harrison

City has sent notification of grant for 2004-05
Scanner & printer have been purchased
Digital camera has been ordered
Dick Folkers to seek higher interest CDs
Archives - Ginny Folkers:
Resolution to reduce archival subject list
Harold Bird & Brett Romer to do computer input
Preservation Committee request

Events - Anne Tuttle:

California Historical Societies conference
Lecture series - last Friday of the month
Moms Club tour

Docents - Jean Ernst:

2/12 La Quinta H.S. visits here
3/15 Art in Public Places
3/23 Idyllwild H.S. visits here
Need more docents, especially for Mondays
Founder's Day - Joyce White & Dan Callahan
Approved \$750 for expenses
Recipient - Jean Ann Hirschi
Palm Awards - 65 letters mailed
Spring Luncheon - Kay Young:
Speaker - Jim Cornett
Annual Picnic - Carol Cole
Tours of historical sites in Palm Desert

*Oh the comfort -- the indescribable comfort
Of feeling safe with a person,
Having neither to weigh thoughts,
Nor consider words -- but pouring them
All right out -- just as they are --*

*Chaff and grain together --
Certain that an understanding hand will
Take and sift them --
Keep what is worth keeping --
And blow the rest away.*

Ginny Folkers, editor

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